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Landscape and Personhood

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Personhood is the condition of being a person, and this condition is defined culturally. Attempts to grasp personhood in the past have often focused on interpreting the body and have frequently been directed toward reconstructing individual lives. Personhood has commonly been conceptualized as the state of being a singular, individual person bounded within the body (cf. Fowler 2004a; Thomas 2004), but persons can also be recognized as multifaceted beings formed through relations with others, consisting of different aspects and extending throughout the material world. In many contexts, the latter may be stressed over the former (e.g., Strathern 1988; cf. LiPuma 1998), and archaeologists have recently turned toward examining the relational characteristics of personhood (e.g., Brück 2004; Fowler 2004a). At the same time, a phenomenological trend investigating ways of “being in the world” explores the embeddedness of body and world. (See Brück 1998, 2006 and Joyce 2005 for recent reviews of work in this area.) Combining these perspectives supports investigation of landscape and personhood together and provides new opportunities to reflect on the relationships between them. Such studies may include a consideration of how an individual’s experience of his or her own self is generated by personal engagement with and within specific places, but it also requires us to consider how personhood is invested in broader cultural engagements with the landscape. In this chapter, I explore some different instances of how communities have inhabited landscapes in ways that materialize distinct senses of personhood and specific ways of conceptualizing the material world and valuing its components. Although this relationship can be approached by considering how landscape becomes embedded within personal identity, here I look at how personhood is distributed throughout, and understood with reference to, the landscape. I focus most heavily on how landscape is inhabited in ways that reflect on the temporal characteristics of personhood.

**The Distribution of Personhood throughout the Landscape**

Personhood is a composite state, with persons consisting of a variety of aspects—examples might include mind, soul, image, breath, spirit, biography, individuality, memory, experience, and name—these aspects may reside in features of the body (see, for example, Meskell and Joyce 2003: ch. 2), and other things and places (see below). The configuration of the person out of such features varies from context to context and is often a matter of debate and controversy. Some personal qualities may be temporary or changeable while
In both these examples, persons are constituted from features or elements of the material world. In such cases, these elements may be conveyed through the human body and through other personal media; they are often drawn together in conceiving and growing a person (and initiating him or her into adulthood) and dispersed during deconception. A person encapsulates the relationships constituting the world and through mortuary practices becomes decomposed into aspects resituated in the landscape.

**Person, Place, and Landscape**

The human body may be thought to combine a range of substances, which may themselves be identified with elements in the landscape. For instance, bodies have often been thought to consist of “humours” that exist elsewhere in the broader world, and changes in the ratios of humours are believed to affect character, mood, and even gender (Busby 1997; Rublack 2002). Shrines, tombs, or houses may be considered to have bodies like human beings and may be composed of materials found in different landscape features. Madagascan Zafimaniry wooden houses built following a marriage begin life flimsy and, in our terms, “green,” hardening and drying out over time as they are turned into more permanent structures; human bodies are initially “wet” and flimsy in the same way (Bloch 1995; cf. the progressive drying of Merina bodies above).

Creating a parallel between house and body illustrates the immersion of the body in its world, stresses the relationships forming both, and can serve to personify houses and households or illustrate their physical embodiment. It can demonstrate the nesting of person, place, and landscape. For example, the floors of trapezoid Mesolithic/Neolithic houses at Lepenski Vir in the Danube Gorges were made from soft red limestone river sediment that hardened once laid down, the walls bedded with white rock cut from the gorge edge behind the village. We could suggest these houses were laid out according to a plan of the human body with skulls and sculpted busts at the narrow “head” end, the heart at the house of the some lined with stone “ribs” that intriguingly resemble jawbones—one actually being a human jawbone (Radovanović 1996: 134, 2000: 337)—and the long front walls as shins from two legs meeting as feet pressed together in the doorway. One of the earliest burials at Lepenski Vir (burial 69) was laid out in this way, shins parallel to the river and head propped up to look at the river and face the rising sun (Radovanović 1996: 178, 2000: 337; Srejović 1972: 153).

In this place, directions of natural movement others are eternal, ancestral, or otherwise pre-exist the individual person. These might also extend after the person’s death. When and after a person dies, aspects of their personhood become transformed, and may be relocated: souls may go to heaven, ghosts may emerge.

The idea of spirits or souls being separated from bodies after death and relocating to another part of the cosmos is familiar to Western thought—other traditions may consider aspects of the person to become associated with places in this plane of existence. Among the Papuan Orokaiva, death involves a process of diminishing a person’s biography or social person (*bamo*) and dealing with their emergent image (*abibi*), as well as their transformation into an anonymous aspect (*onderi*) that roams the forest in the form of a wild pig (Iteanu 1988, 1995). Features of the deceased’s personal biography are remembered through the curation of their intimate possessions by survivors, and their image will be encountered through prestigious gifts displayed at mortuary practices or circulated between individuals and communities. The qualities of personhood may therefore be extended for the Orokaiva to things, animals, and zones of the landscape, as well as to the human body. The boundaries of the person fluctuate throughout life through interactions via objects, animals, and places. Eventually the person becomes unbounded through mortuary practices (cf. Fowler 2004a: 87–92).

For the Madagascan Merina, people are “hairs growing out of the head,” which is the ancestral land (Bloch 1982: 211). After death, the body is interred on a hill near to the village where its soft parts, which were contributed through the female line, leach into the soil. The dry, desiccated remains are exhumed years later and taken to a distant tomb in a communal necropolis associated with the male lineage that contributed to that person’s body. These remains become “earth,” associated with fertility and ongoing social generation (Bloch 1982: 215). The Merina, Bloch reports, consider their kinship endogamous, and so the ancestral energies are maintained within the ongoing community by this practice, while flesh, redundant of distinct individual bodies and carrying the pollution of death, is removed in the early stages of mortuary rituals. Different aspects of the body are therefore distributed to appropriate landscape locations with distinct associations (including temporal and gendered ones), and ancestral substance from people who may have lived far apart from one another in life is combined in the tombs. Merina personhood therefore requires the direction of essences not only through human bodies but also through the landscape.

In this place, directions of natural movement...
Chapter 29: Landscape and Personhood

Vicki Cummings, Andy Jones, and Aaron Watson (2002) have demonstrated that the location of a group of Neolithic long cairns in southern Wales places them in an "asymmetrical" landscape with views of the Black Mountain escarpment in one direction and low open land in another. These asymmetrical places divide the landscape along the long axis of the monument (for example, Penywyrdod) (Figure 29.1). Their interpretation of this phenomenon is that the spatial liminality of these places between upland and lowland was emblematic of their role in the transformation of bodies between life and ancestry. Like the landscape experienced at this place, corpses secluded here became asymmetrical as they decayed in this liminal state, before bodily symmetry was returned when the bones of the skeleton were fully exposed. The arrangement of place, landscape perception from that place, and personal transformation effected there were intelligible through a consistent logic.

Liminal phases of ritualized personal transformations are located in liminal places and times. Personal movement through the landscape while, for instance, herding animals, carrying relic remains of the dead, or transporting axe heads intended to be hafted and given away at specific places, connected cycles of daily time, annual time, the time of exchange relations, and generational time in the journeys of personal life. Exactly how these interactions with and within the landscape took place changed throughout these millennia. I will trace the relationship between landscape and personhood more closely in just a few cases.

### Personal Transformation and the Landscapes of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Britain

The landscapes of Britain are rich in Neolithic and Bronze Age remains. Mortuary structures within the earlier Neolithic often channeled the movement of human remains along linear chambers (Lucas 1996). Later in the earlier Neolithic, many were covered with earthen mounds that were also thrown up over midden and other places. Causewayed enclosures—large gathering places visited seasonally—were often located at the boundary between two landscape zones. Many earlier to middle Neolithic cursus monuments—linear paths defined by banks, ditches, pits or posts—were located to cut streams or run parallel to rivers, which they resembled (Brophy 2000). They directed movement through landscapes, and some of these route ways became monumentalized by cutting ditches and raising mounds of earth as banks (Johnston 1999; Tilley 1994: 170–201). Later Neolithic henges created circular spaces located at the center of broad landscapes, some hemmed by a circle of hills on the horizon (Watson 2001). Passage graves and stone circles frequently directed attention toward regular celestial phenomena. Personal movement through the landscape while, for instance, herding animals, carrying relic remains of the dead, or transporting axe heads intended to be hafted and given away at specific places, connected cycles of daily time, annual time, the time of exchange relations, and generational time in the journeys of personal life. Exactly how these interactions with and within the landscape took place changed throughout these millennia. I will trace the relationship between landscape and personhood more closely in just a few cases.

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practices but other rites of passage such as initiation into adulthood and acts intended to heal, purify, fulfill a debt or relationship, or bring on personal revelation. Other phases of such personal transformation may involve movement through the wider landscape. Landscape is experienced as narrative sequence, and such narratives may be equated with journeys of personal transformation. For instance, water-rounded quartz pebbles have been found deposited at the Cashtal yn Ard chambered cairn and at the Billelton enclosure on the Isle of Man. These were probably brought from the shore or streams. Cashtal yn Ard is located on a round hill with views of the high hills in one direction and sea in the other—the hill is bounded on three sides by streams that flow to a quartz-rich beach (Cummings and Fowler 2004; Fowler 2004b) (Figure 29.2). Viewed from Cashtal yn Ard, the sun rises from the sea and sets behind the high hills. From the horseshoe-shaped forecourt, the passage of the monument provided a “path” through the stone chambers toward the sea, and looking inland away from the entrance to the site a valley provided a path into the high hills that face the open end of this forecourt. Being there located a person at the center of the world, on a conceptual island within the Isle of Man, punctuating a journey from coast to highland with an encounter with the relic remains of the past. That journey linked land, shore, and sea, while bringing living and dead and water and stone (par-
when the center of the world shifted from the living to the dead.

Joanna Brück (2004: 321) has discussed how one of the early Bronze Age barrows from the Yorkshire Wolds included clay brought to the vicinity from elsewhere—something Mortimer (1905) suggests for a number of barrows in the area—and Mary-Ann Owoc (2002: 135) has noted how distinctive yellow clay was brought to Caerloggas Downs III in Cornwall from at least 3 km away. Communities composed each of these monuments from multiple points of origin, just as any body deposited may have been multiply constituted. Human remains deposited at such barrows were therefore involved in reflecting on cosmological patterns (and perhaps in cosmogenic acts) alongside soil, wood, and other materials (Owoc 2005). These actions drew the world together in one place and referenced ties of belonging to landscape locations, and potentially ties of kinship as well (Brück 2004: 322). Owoc (2005) reminds us that the treatment of the dead should here be contextualized within a broader cosmological order taken up and transformed at each site. She examines successive phases of activity at another site, Trelen 2, and notes how the changing architecture referenced the movement of the sun, first through monument siting and alignment, and later through materials, color, and pat-

Figure 29.2  Schematic rendering of the landscape location of Cashtal yn Ard, Isle of Man (produced by the author).

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Part IV: Living Landscapes: The Body and the Experience of Place

Inheriting and Negotiating Ways of Being in the World

Neither regional diversity nor change through time should be overlooked—in the previous section I have not produced a seamless continuous chronological narrative but rather discussed a few examples of relations between landscape and personhood from different times and places in British prehistory. Personhood was negotiated differently with regard to the landscape and its features in each period. Some trends did endure over the long term, although they were exhibited through differing transformations of the landscape (see Bradley 1998). Many earlier Neolithic monuments seem to lend themselves to an experience of place memorable relative to time of year (see below), but they became a series of similar places in the landscape are known, inhabited, and experienced (2004) highlights that in two cases such as these, architecture is inauspicious. Instead, the dead are remembered through oral traditions. Harrison (2004: 144, 149) anticipates that memories and moods, like other features of personhood, are inextricable from social interaction with others (living and dead) through places and objects as much as they are felt in a body or perceived and recalled by a mind. Recent archaeological studies have focused on how personhood is connected to landscape through such patterns in experience and memory—Andy Jones’s focus on different “technologies of remembrance” being particularly evocative here (e.g., Jones 2001, 2003).

The examples I have explored here differ from one another, but the generation of personhood, materiality, and landscape in other contexts may exhibit a far wider degree of difference than these (see also, for example, Jones 2005a). The nature of landscapes differs widely, as do ways of living in them and knowing about them. For the English, the landscape is known as natural, and the cultural actions of people are swallowed by nature over time—archaeologists recover the traces of such actions and so help “remember” a forgotten past (Harrison 2004: 144, 149). It is anticipated that people and events will be remembered through cultural inscription on the landscape. Among the Avatip, their riverine forest landscape is continually changing through a blend of the actions of human and nonhuman agents. Memory of the past is not involved in maintaining places by monumentalizing them—encountering the remains of the dead, including past places, artifacts, and architecture is inauspicious. Instead, the dead are remembered through oral traditions. Harrison (2004) highlights that in two cases such as these, landscapes are known, inhabited, and experienced in different ways.

Although I have focused on the cultural intersections between landscape and personhood, the certain personal interactions and transformations. In a similar vein, Cummings and Whittle (2003: 262–63, 2004: 71–72) have also argued for seasonal differences in experience at chambered tombs in woodlands, suggesting an association between fleshted corpses and leafy trees and between bare winter trees and defleshed bone. These patterns demonstrate a link between cycles of personal transformation and seasonal changes with gatherings at monuments potentially conjointing key moments in both (cf. Boric’s 2002 interpretation of red autumn foliage against the white cliffs around Lepenski Vir, above). Harrison’s discussion on the “mood” of a contemporary Papuan village throughout the seasons is pertinent here, illustrating that seasonal differences in how landscapes look and feel bring to the fore distinctive reflections on personhood, the dead, and the passing of time (Harrison 2001). Memories and moods, like other features of personhood, are inextricable from social interaction with others (living and dead) through places and objects as much as they are felt in a body or perceived and recalled by a mind. Recent archaeological studies have focused on how personhood is connected to landscape through such patterns in experience and memory—Andy Jones’s focus on different “technologies of remembrance” being particularly evocative here (e.g., Jones 2001, 2003).

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on each other are ultimately dependent on the social and political negotiation of such cultural factors. No matter how basic a feature of existence personhood might seem to be, personhood and schemes of materiality are socially and politically negotiated. A vital and challenging area for ongoing research lies in tracing strategies through which different interest groups pursued personhood (Chapman 2000; Fowler 2005). This includes struggles over how personhood was negotiated through different ways of valuing and manipulating bodies, objects, and landscapes. The role of things, substances, and human and animal bodies in constituting personhood and tracing relations between people are crucial areas of study that need to be situated alongside the kind of landscape studies discussed here (e.g., Brück 2004; Chapman 2000; Fowler 2001, 2002; Jones 1998, 2002, 2005b; Thomas 1996: ch. 6, 1999). Equally, as Brück (2001) argues, consideration needs to be given to the use of monumentalized places in different contexts—from ceremonial gatherings to herding livestock to acts of deposition involving only one or two individuals. Each afforded different contexts for knowing a landscape and negotiating a sense of personhood.

Conclusions

Being a person is, in a Western world, generally differentiated from being an animal, an object, or a place; being a person is a matter of being human. However, personhood need not be conceptualized as solely the province of human beings, and the qualities that compose or characterize persons might be shared with animals, objects, and landscape features (Fowler 2004). The landscape may be rich in the presence of nonhuman persons and other kinds of beings; landscapes may be seen as the residue of their passing, made sacred by the presence of their bodies. Personhood and landscape are linked through specific schemes of materiality, acted on through particular practices and routines. A phenomenological approach that did not reflect on past ways of valuing (and negotiating the value of) bodies and material things but proceeded directly to recording experience of the landscape through contemporary Western understandings of materiality and embodiment would be insufficient to the task of interpreting past relationships between personhood and landscape. Being aware of this, many contemporary studies recognize that being a person is not an isolated state; it involves being-with-others and being-in-the-world. There are many different such ways of being, and role in interpreting both past people’s lives and past cultural worlds.

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Note

1. One of the sculptures from house XLIV found lying on its back could be interpreted as having feet trussed together in the same way (a feature usually interpreted as genitalia), commemorating such a mortuary practice.

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